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*THE MARROW OF CALVIN'S THEOLOGY*<sup>1</sup>

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As every man has both generic and specific characteristics which are common to him with his kind and group, and also certain traits which constitute his individuality, so likewise every thoughtful man has ideas which are the intellectual staple of his age and race and also others which are in a peculiar sense his own. It does not therefore follow that these common ideas are untrue: on the contrary, they may be nearer the truth than those which are relatively unshared; or that they are unimportant, for, even if erroneous, they may furnish points of contact through which his more distinctive opinion finds its way into the popular mind; nevertheless, they may be disregarded in estimating his contribution to the history of thought. Accordingly, nothing will be said here of doctrines, those pertaining to Christ and the Trinity for instance, which Calvin held in substantial agreement with contemporary and traditional Christianity; nor shall we refer to theories concerning the Church, its officers and sacraments, which, although highly significant both at the time and as shaping subsequent ecclesiastical history, have but slight connection with the ideas which make up the distinctively Calvinistic system of theology. We shall restrict ourselves therefore to Calvin's system within his system, to a definite, consistent nexus of ideas, relating principally to sin and salvation, which are, so to speak, the marrow of his body of divinity. And with reference to these, we shall undertake to present them as they appear in the definitive edition of the *Institutes*, without attempting to trace their relations, of dependence, resemblance, or difference, to ideas of his theological predecessors, like Augustine and Gottschalk, or contemporaries like Luther, Zwingli, Melancthon, or Bucer; still less shall we essay to follow a possible process of his own

<sup>1</sup>A lecture given in the Lowell Institute Course at King's Chapel, Boston, Feb. 1, 1909.

thought through the successive editions and enlargements of the *Institutes*. These are fascinating and fruitful fields of inquiry but they are outside our present task. It should go without saying that Calvin's system, or even the marrow of it, was not his own in the sense that he invented it: on the contrary, he simply made more explicit, and carried more consistently to their logical conclusions, ideas which had been practically universal in Christian theology since the days of Paul. The system was his not by origination, but by vital and organic appropriation. Nor are we concerned here with criticism: it would indeed be profitable to trace the course of the inner dialectic of the system, particularly in its development by the New England theologians, and mark its "collapse" because of inability to answer its own questions and fulfil the ethical ideal itself had nourished, but at present we have to do neither with criticism nor with appreciation, but solely with exposition, and—since Calvinism is now almost everywhere spoken against—with sympathetic exposition, which shall at least attempt to indicate why the system proved persuasive with so many successive generations of right-minded and right-hearted men.

It is always necessary, however, if we would justly comprehend a man's thought to see what interests prompted it and what purposes sought fulfilment in it. Calvin's supreme task was to consolidate the sentiment of the Reformation into an intellectual system as firm and coherent as that of the Roman Catholicism against which it was arrayed. Manifestly, the strategic point of this controversy was the doctrine of redemption. Luther preached justification by faith as a saving power; Calvin taught salvation by grace as a cardinal doctrine. The former emphasized a human experience, the latter the divine efficiency, but both were presenting the same truth, viewed in the one case on the manward, in the other on the Godward side. Under Luther, it might have been held that the agencies of the Church were effectual, perhaps indispensable, to the production of faith or as mediating the saving grace, but Calvin sought to prove that since salvation is wholly and exclusively the effect of God's grace, exercised in accordance with his eternal decree and directly upon the souls of the elect, the Church has no direct and effective

function with respect to salvation, nor has the individual man any co-operative part therein. Manifestly, if this could be proved, the Church would be put permanently out of commission as a means of salvation. But, while Romanism was Calvin's foe in front, there was an enemy on the left flank which menaced the Reformed churches quite as seriously—the Anabaptists. With these outlaws, as they were then deemed, the Romanists sought to identify all the Reformed,—an identification which was not difficult because they actually did maintain many of the unacknowledged conclusions of Reformation principles logically developed, and consequently attracted many thorough-going Protestants to their guerilla-like band. Such identification was, however, pre-eminently dangerous because of the abhorrence in which Anabaptists were held by civil rulers without whose strong and continued support the whole Reformation movement would have been endangered. Indeed, the letter to King Francis which introduced the first edition of the *Institutes*, expressly declared that one object of the treatise was to demonstrate that the identification of Protestants with Anabaptists, which had already given occasion for persecution, was false and malicious. Hence, in opposing the Papacy, Calvin was obliged most carefully to ward off all suspicion of Anabaptism, and at several points it is plain that his doctrinal line of battle was refused against this ever-present menace.

This appears, for example, in his treatment of the Bible, the authority of which was accepted by Romanist and Protestant alike. The argument of the former, however, was that the Bible was the Church's book, produced and made canonical by it, and therefore resting ultimately upon its authority, and dependent upon it for true interpretation. Of course, Calvin could not accept this view, but it obliged him to establish the authority of Scripture apart from the Church. Calvin adduces the antiquity of the Bible, its dignity in substance and style as contrasted with the humble character of its reputed authors, its frankness, the miracles and prophecies attesting its divine origin, its endurance of the assaults of enemies, and its fitness to the needs of Christendom, but he openly acknowledges that these considerations alone can never establish the convincing author-

ity of Scripture. There is indeed a congruity between the Word and the works of God which confirms faith in the identity of authorship—but the revelation of God in his works is dim and obscure, to be read only by those who use his revelation in the Word as spectacles through which alone the revelations of nature become legible. Ultimately, therefore, Calvin rests his assurance of the authority of Scripture upon the secret testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer. The Word, he affirms, will never gain full credit in the hearts of men, unless it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit. To those in whom the Spirit abides, the Scripture exhibits as clear evidence of its truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things of their taste. Plainly, with this emphasis upon the Spirit, Calvin came dangerously near Anabaptism, and therefore he guards himself against the manifest peril by emphatically declaring that the voice of the Spirit in the Word must be the decisive test of all alleged private revelations. The Anabaptists claim direct communications from the Spirit:—To the law and the testimony!—if they speak not according to this rule there is no light in them. “He [the Spirit] is the author of the Scriptures: he cannot be mutable and inconsistent with himself. He must therefore perpetually remain such as he has there discovered himself to be” (*Inst.* i, 9. 2). Hence “the office of the Spirit . . . is not to feign new and unheard of revelations, or to coin a new system of doctrine . . . but to seal to our minds the same doctrine which the Gospel delivers” (*Inst.* i, 9. 1). The function of the Spirit, then, is not to continue a progressive revelation, but solely to give inner witness to the divine certainty of one already given in the Word, final and complete. That is to say, the Spirit is invoked to prove the Scripture and then the Scripture becomes the criterion of the Spirit. But it should be observed that on this ground Calvin accepts the decisive authority of Scripture. It is true that we do not find in him the extravagances of post-reformation Scholasticism—he was too sane and knew his Bible too well for that. He is no stickler for absolute infallibility, but, while he acknowledges historical slips, he never permits minor inaccuracies to shake his faith in the substantial ethical and religious finality of the Bible. Yet it must be borne

in mind that only the regenerate, in whom the Spirit dwells, can have this first-hand vital assurance: the Bible does not engender faith; faith attests the Bible; and faith is the fruit of the Spirit in the heart of man. Belief in the Bible cannot contribute to a man's salvation, since only the regenerate man can really and heartily have this belief.

Notwithstanding the preference which Calvin has for the Word over the works of God, we shall find it better to approach his system by what, undoubtedly, he would have deemed a meaner way. Whether we look out upon the world or within upon our own hearts nothing is more certain and impressive than the universality of sin. Literature bears witness to the appalling fact, observation of contemporary life and the struggles of our own souls alike confess it. So far, then, as knowledge, observation, and experience establish anything, it is the world-wide and age-long presence and power of sin. What, then, is the explanation of this fact? For so universal an effect an equally universal cause must be sought. No cause operating solely upon individuals as such could produce so constant and uniform a result. If it be said that universal sin is due to the exercise of man's own will, the question arises why man's will universally and invariably determines itself in this particular way. Edwards puts the argument strikingly in his *Doctrine of Original Sin* (Pt. 1, ch. 1, sect. ix):

If their wills are in the first place as free to Good as Evil, what is it to be ascribed to, that the world of mankind, consisting of so many millions, in so many successive generations, without consultation, all agree to exercise their freedom in favor of evil? . . . How comes it to pass, that the free will of mankind has been determined to evil, in like manner before the Flood, and after the Flood; under the Law and under the Gospel; among both Jews and Gentiles, under the Old Testament; and since that, among Christians, Jews, Mahometans; among Papists and Protestants; in those nations where civility, politeness, arts, and learning most prevail, and among the negroes and Hottentots in Africa, the Tartars in Asia, and Indians in America, towards both the poles and on every side of the Globe; in greatest cities, and obscurest villages; in palaces, and in huts, wigwams, and cells under ground? Is it enough to reply, It happens so, that men everywhere and at all times choose thus to determine their own wills and so to make themselves sinful, as soon as ever they are capable of it, and to sin constantly as long as they live, and universally to choose never to come up half-way to their duty?

A similar indictment is found in a well-known and often quoted passage in Newman's *Apologia*, and as Edwards infers that there must be a steady cause to account for so steady an effect, so Newman argues that the human race must be implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity which has put it out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. To Calvin also, this conclusion seemed quite inevitable. For did not the Bible also testify to this frightful and universal fact? "All have sinned . . . there is none that doeth good; no, not so much as one." And the Bible thus recognizing the condition offers also its explanation: "Through one man sin entered into the world." Here, then, in the fall of Adam, from whom all men are descended, is the explanation of the universal fact. By his sin he lost certain gifts with which he had been endowed, lost them not only for himself but for his posterity, even as a father who squanders his estate robs his children of their rightful patrimony. And there was not only deprivation but also depravity, since, having lost his original divine endowment, Adam went ever deeper into sin, thus vitiating his nature, which in its corrupt and depraved state was transmitted to his offspring. If a father weakens himself by vice, does not his son inherit the consequences in a defiled body and an enfeebled will?

Here then is the doctrine of original sin, or of depravity, based on facts of observation and experience, recognized by the Bible, and accounted for in a perfectly intelligible way by the sin of our first ancestor which resulted in the loss of godlike powers and in the acquisition of a corrupt nature, both of which consequences passed through to his posterity. Calvin would have agreed with Newman—"The doctrine of what is theologically called original sin becomes to me almost as certain as that the world exists and as the existence of God" (*Apol.* c. 5). In his own emphatic words, "Let us hold this, then, as an undoubted truth, which no opposition can ever shake—that the mind of man is so completely alienated from the righteousness of God, that it conceives, desires, and undertakes everything that is impious, perverse, base, impure, and flagitious; that his heart is so thoroughly infected by the poison of sin, that it cannot produce anything but what is corrupt; and that if at any time men do anything apparently good,

yet the mind always remains involved in hypocrisy and fallacious obliquity, and the heart enslaved by its inward perverseness" (*Inst.* ii, 5. 19).

Since, then, all men are sinners, all are under the wrath of God and liable to the penalty which he has decreed against sin. That penalty is death—physical and spiritual, temporal and eternal. Since, within the sphere of our observation, the temporal punishment is universally inflicted, we have every reason to believe that the invisible and eternal penalty also follows. And this indeed is inevitable, since all men come into life sinful and hence exposed to the just punishment of sin. The universality of physical death is valid symbol and sign of the universality of spiritual doom. It should be observed, however, that we are not punished as the penalty of Adam's sin: the punishment is solely for our own personal pollution of nature, made ours because of connection with our first ancestor. Unless, therefore, some way of salvation can be found, the sin of Adam will have plunged all mankind in utter and awful destruction.

It is manifest, however, that such salvation cannot be wrought out by man. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Upon the tree of a corrupt and depraved nature no good fruit can grow. On account of the depraved condition of man, it is impossible that he should produce any works well-pleasing to God. If any are to be saved, therefore, the saving influence must come from without. This, which is the plain teaching of reason, is again amply confirmed by Scripture, which teaches unmistakably that God has provided a way by which alone some out of the ruined mass of mankind are to be saved through the operation of his regenerating spirit. In this work of regeneration, God alone is active, man is wholly passive. As this is for Calvin the vital point of the whole discussion, he uses his utmost endeavors to rule out man's possible activity, even by way of co-operation, in the saving process. Church-membership does not avail, for, while the present work of the Spirit is restricted to those who are within the circle of the visible Church, it by no means follows that because one belongs to the external and visible Church he is therefore numbered among those who make up the Church invisible, composed only of the regenerate. Nor can



what are usually called good works profit; for, if they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, they are not good in the sight of God. But surely faith is man's act and his faith co-operates with God's grace, making it individually effective: by no means, for faith is not merely an intellectual acceptance—the devils so believe and tremble, and remain devils still—but consists in a fixed reliance upon God's promises, arising from union with Christ which is due to the operation of the Spirit alone. Only the regenerate, then, can exercise true faith, which is therefore the effect and not the cause of regeneration. Hence "the Scripture uniformly proclaims it [faith] to be the gratuitous gift of God" (*Inst.* ii, 3. 8). and, inasmuch as without faith it is impossible to please God, it follows that, without that which his grace supplies, nothing,—no works, however good to outward seeming,—can win his approval. But man's repentance is surely his own: not at all, for true repentance is wrought only by the activity of the Holy Spirit. It is not a single event antecedent to regeneration: it is a process continued through life, wrought by the Spirit in the souls of the regenerate. With scrupulous care Calvin closes every loophole through which man's activity could by any chance, or in even the slightest degree, enter into the work of salvation. God's grace alone, manifest in the operation of his Spirit, is the sole agency of salvation. Man in his sinfulness is doomed and absolutely helpless. Salvation is only by God's grace.

Inasmuch, however, as God alone is the effective cause of salvation, if some men are not saved must it not be solely because upon these God does not exert his saving influence? This certainly follows, and its plain statement is Calvin's doctrine of election and reprobation. For it is manifest that not all men are saved. The Christian Church, within which alone the redemptive forces play, comprises but an infinitesimal part of the great multitudes who have lived upon the earth or who are living now. The untold millions of heathendom, men, women, children, one and all have swept down into hell, necessarily, since they could not have believed in him of whom they had not heard. Calvin openly commits himself to the traditional doctrine that "the Church is the mother of all those who have Him for their Father"

(*Inst.* iv, 1. 1), saying in terms, "There is no other way of entrance into life unless we are conceived by her, born of her, nourished at her breast, and continually preserved under her care and government"; "Out of her bosom there can be no hope of remission of sins, or any salvation" (*Inst.* iv, 1. 4). Moreover, even in Christian lands the great majority die without giving evidence of regeneration, and these too are irremediably lost. This also is the testimony of Scripture, which beyond cavil speaks of an eternal punishment for human souls. Since, therefore, salvation is from God alone, and not all are saved, it follows that there are some upon whom he is pleased to exert his saving power, and others whom he simply leaves to their merited doom. And the reason for this discrimination cannot lie at all in the characters of those who belong to the one or the other class, for in that case the ultimate ground of salvation would be in man, not in God. Consequently the discrimination must be due to God's will alone. And this again the Bible teaches: "The children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth, it was said . . . Jacob have I loved, but Esau I hated. . . . For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion, on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy. . . . So then he hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9 11-18).

Could anything be plainer or more explicit? Before even the creation of the world, out of the innumerable multitudes of men yet to be born, all of whom were to fall under the penalty of eternal death, God arbitrarily selected some whom he determined, in course of time, to visit with his Spirit unto regeneration and life, and, by choosing these, simply passed over the rest, leaving them to their just deserts. "*Quos deus praeterit reprobant.*" The choice was perfectly arbitrary; it was not determined by merit, else man would have a share in his own salvation, and furthermore is it not written that man is called *unto* holiness, not *because of* holiness? Nor is God's decree based upon his foreknowledge, for, since nothing can happen except by his will, his foreknowledge must be foreknowledge of his will. Conse-

quently foreknowledge rests on decrees, decrees do not rest on foreknowledge.

Let us then put in a single paragraph this part of his system. All men come into the world sinful because of their race-connection with Adam; and because sinful, exposed to eternal death. On account of their utterly base and undone condition not one of them can by any striving of his own win approval of God and deliverance unto life. Out of this helpless and hopeless state, therefore, none can escape save by the direct and irresistible act of God in regeneration, and, since it is evident that not all men are saved, it logically follows that it is not his will to visit all with his redeeming grace. What is the inevitable conclusion therefore but that, before the creation of the world, God chose out of the hosts of mankind yet to be born some whom he fore-ordained to eternal bliss. To these in the fulness of time he sends his prevailing grace with regenerating power. And the grace which is irresistible in regeneration is equally irresistible for maintenance: hence these cannot perish, and the perseverance of the saints logically follows. But those who are not thus elected, being involved in the guilt of Adam's sin and consequently totally without holiness or ability to help themselves, are never visited by the Spirit and hence go down to hell. This is the nerve of Calvinism.

We shall understand this better if we consider certain objections which have been urged against the system.

1. Is it true that all men are alike depraved and deserving of eternal punishment? Is it true that no men are better than others? Surely there are differences of character even among the unregenerate: surely Epictetus was a better man than Nero, and yet neither was aided by grace, if grace be restricted within the limits of the Church. Yes, Calvin acknowledges the difference but declares that it is due solely to the working of the restraining grace of God. There is common grace, which is manifest in the affairs of men in all ages and lands, but this is not the same as saving grace, which operates only within the limits of Christendom. And in order to carry out the divine purposes this common grace restrains men from the full exhibition of the utter depravity which lies at the heart of all. In the sight of

God, who seeth not as man seeth but looketh into the hearts of all, Epictetus was not a whit better than Nero. Their hearts were equally vile and corrupt, but for his own purposes God saw fit to restrain the expression of that wickedness in the former and not to restrain it in the latter. Hence in so far as the one appears better than the other it is mere appearance, and an appearance due to no merit in Epictetus, since it is solely the effect of God's restraining grace.

2. Does not this doctrine impeach the sincerity of God in giving to all men a law which it now appears only the regenerate can obey, and in offering to all men promises which only a few can accept? A crazy Methodist evangelist, somewhat notorious in his day, Lorenzo Dow by name, used to refer to contemporary Calvinists as the All-Part men and explained the epithet as meaning that, where the Bible spells *All*, they pronounce it *Part*. How can God sincerely demand an obedience to law which cannot be rendered, or hold out promises of salvation which only here and there one can embrace? Nevertheless, with reference to the Law, is it not the teaching of Paul himself that it was given to reveal sin, and even to increase sin, so that through his conscious helplessness man may be brought to the salvation of Christ? He himself had been unable to keep the Law; he therefore concluded that no man could, and hence that it was not given to be kept, but was intended only as a tutor to bring us to Christ. So Calvin teaches that the law "was placed far beyond our ability, in order to convince us of our impotence." How can one who holds Paul's teaching true find fault with Calvin? Moreover, if the Law cannot be kept by the unregenerate, it can by the regenerate, and is therefore of utmost service to them as revealing a way of life well-pleasing to God. And as for the promises, they could not be limited without revealing the elect, who exist only in the undisclosed purpose of God. There is a distinction to be drawn between the secret and the preceptive will of God; his will and grace are declared to all, although it is his secret will that only some should obey and accept. "Whosoever will, let him come": yes, whosoever will, may come, but no man can will to come except the Spirit draw him. The promises, that is, are always made conditionally, and the conditions are of such a nature that none can fulfil them apart from saving grace.

3. But is it not unjust in God thus to elect some and pass over others? Does not such a doctrine as this make God an infinitely unjust being? To this there are several replies, of which three may be presented.

(a) No one who believes in the divine government of the world can fail to see that in all its essential features this doctrine is true to the facts of human life. One child is born in squalor and sin, another in surroundings of comfort and to influences of goodness. Walk through the slums of a city and compare the deformed, diseased, doomed children sprawling on the doorsteps and the sidewalks with the children of our own homes: is there not a difference? What chance of good and happy life have these children compared with ours? Is it the fault of these children of the slums that they are what they are? Did they choose the sin and wretchedness into which they are born? Are they responsible for being there? Yet they are there. And if God governs the world, if his will is revealed in the order of things, is it not in accordance with his will that they are there? Unless therefore one is ready to deny out of hand God's will in the world, he cannot deny the arbitrary discriminations of God. Furthermore, are not the separations of God recorded in sacred history? Did not God choose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in succession, not because of their desert but because of his own sovereign will? Did he not choose Israel out of all the nations of the earth? Did not Christ say to his disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you"? In nature and in grace therefore the same principle is displayed. The differences of earth and time are but manifestations of the differences in eternal destiny,—expressions of the same principle. Beware lest, in protesting against election, you turn atheist.

(b) Wherein is the injustice of such discrimination? Is it not true, as matter of common observation and experience, that a spendthrift father deprives his son of his rightful patrimony, and do we complain of that law as unjust? Is it not true that a diseased father transmits the taint to his son,—is such inheritance unjust? But, whether it seem unjust or not, the fact is indubitable. And if we accept the principle in things visible and temporal, can we deny it in things invisible and eternal?

Are not both worlds under the one divine law? Is it, then, unjust that God should punish sin? If not, then men who are sinful in nature, and all men are, must be the deserving objects of God's wrath and hatred of sin. And, if all men are thus doomed and God wills to spare some, have those who are passed over any just cause for complaint? They get their deserts. If, for example, a conspiracy is discovered in a nation and all those implicated in it are condemned to death, to death justly deserved, is injustice done to others if the monarch wills to show clemency to a few? If indeed the discrimination were on the basis of previous good behavior, if the question of desert or ill desert were once raised, then those who go to their merited doom might justly complain, perhaps, that they were no less deserving of mercy than those who have been pardoned, but it has already been shown that in God's election the choice is absolutely without regard to merit and proceeds from arbitrary will alone. All men are justly doomed; but in God is mercy as well as justice, and how can mercy be shown save in the salvation of some under just condemnation, and arbitrarily selected, since, if merit enters, mercy is cancelled. God's justice is revealed in the condemnation of all, his clemency in the salvation of some; but those who justly die cannot charge God with injustice because they are passed over while others likewise under sentence of death are mercifully spared. With this plea Calvin might well have been content, for the logic is inexorable and the alternatives are unavoidable. Is it unjust that all Adam's posterity should suffer loss and incur corruption because of his sin? The same principle operates before our very eyes in the processes of human life, and are not those processes in accordance with the will of God? To deny God's responsibility for the facts of human life is atheism. If, on the other hand, the principle is justified here, it cannot be pronounced unjust with reference to spiritual concerns. Calvinist or atheist, which? Is there discrimination here in the case of children born in favorable or unfavorable conditions? Then there are but two alternatives—either God has naught to do with temporal discriminations or the principle justified here cannot be denied in things eternal. Again, atheist or Calvinist? Furthermore, does not the Bible distinctly teach that all men are

sinner because of Adam's sin, that all are under condemnation, that God foreknows and calls whom he wills, and that the rest go down to hell; and do you believe the Bible? Here the alternatives are Calvinism or infidelity. And it does not avail to say that the Bible teaches also an opposite doctrine, for even if that were granted, the reply would be that it unmistakably teaches this, and it is for man to accept what God plainly declares and leave Him to do the reconciling. And to reject some teachings of the Bible on account of others which seem contradictory is to reject the Bible altogether as final authority, for an authority which permits one to exercise preferences among its declarations is no longer an authority in any just sense of the word.

(c) But Calvin has yet another argument in reply to the objection we are now considering, namely: God is just, his will is right; there is no higher standard of justice than his will. That this is his will is not only revealed in the facts of human life as it comes under our observation, but also declared in his unimpeachable Word; therefore it is and must be just, whether we can see it so or not. Who are we to sit in judgment on him who inhabiteth eternity? What colossal conceit and impudence to presume to set our standard of justice, born of our ignorance and depravity, over against the eternal wisdom and holiness! Nay, just because of our moral depravity, a system which should thoroughly commend itself to our unregenerate moral sense would be presumably untrue to the ethics of heaven. Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? One cannot help feeling that here Calvin ultimately rested. He was not insensible to the awfulness of the teaching. "I inquire again," he says, arguing with his opponents, "how it came to pass that the fall of Adam, independent of any remedy, should involve so many nations with their infant children in eternal death, but because such was the will of God. It is an awful decree, I confess—"*Decretum quidem horribile, fateor*" (*Inst.* iii, 23. 7). But the facts of observation and experience religiously interpreted and the explicit affirmations of Scripture left no alternative. "If your mind is disturbed," he says, "embrace without reluctance the advice of Augustine: 'You, a man, expect an answer from me who am also a man? Let us both therefore hear him who

says, O man, who art thou? Faithful ignorance is better than presumptuous knowledge. Seek your deserts, you will find nothing but punishment. O the depth! Peter denies, the thief believes; O the depth! Do you seek a reason, I will tremble at the depth. Reason, if you will. I will wonder. Dispute, if you will, I will believe. I see the depth. I reach not the bottom. Paul was at rest because he found wonder. He calls the judgments of God unsearchable, and are you come to scrutinize them? He says, his ways are past finding out, and are you come to investigate them?' We shall do no good by proceeding further: it will not satisfy their petulance; the Lord needs no other defence than what he has employed by his Spirit speaking by the mouth of Paul: and we forget to speak well, when we cease to speak with God" (*Inst.* iii, 23. 5).

"A horrible decree, I confess," yet to it as to the counsel of God Calvin felt himself driven in fidelity to the works and the interpreting Word of God. Before the awful majesty of the Eternal, whose ways are not as our ways, whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, he laid his hand upon his mouth and in awed silence wondered at the depth. It is and must be the Lord's will, yet there is no injustice in Him: better to deny our poor human sense of justice than to impugn the justice of God. Yea, let God be true and every man a liar. So the Scripture and so Calvin.

4. But there is still one other objection which leaves Calvin face to face with a dreadful dilemma. Is God the author of sin, or, to put it otherwise, did God decree Adam's fall and by his decree effect it? Calvin earnestly protests that Adam alone of all mankind had free will, and endowments which enabled him not to sin. Did God simply fail to sustain him with the power of perseverance, so rendering him liable to sin? Then is not God, who withdraws support, responsible for the fall? Did God leave this cardinal event of all human history to chance? That were a preposterous supposition, since Calvin has argued convincingly against the presence of chance in the world, and especially since God's decrees all depended on Adam's sin, which therefore must have been itself decreed. Did then God merely foreknow that Adam would fall? It was impossible for Calvin to



take refuge in such an idea, since he had argued that knowledge depends on decrees and not the reverse. Did, then, God simply permit, by not preventing, the fall? This too is a perfectly impossible plea for one who like Calvin has argued that the will of God is influential and not merely permissive. "He declares that he creates light and darkness, that he forms good and evil, and that no evil occurs which he has not performed" (*Inst.* i, 18. 3). "Providence consists in action" (i, 16. 4). No, however Calvin may protest, his logic leads to but one issue: God decreed the fall of Adam and by his effective will became thus the ultimate cause of sin. "God not only foresaw the fall of the first man and his posterity in him, but also arranged all by the determination of his own will. . . . For the first man fell because the Lord had determined it was so expedient. The reason for this determination is unknown to us. Yet it is certain that he determined thus only because he foresaw that it would tend to the just illustration of the glory of his name" (*Inst.* iii, 23. 7-8). It is true that Calvin goes on to say that by his own wickedness Adam corrupted the nature he had received pure from the Lord, but he does not inform us whence the wickedness came into that pure nature, and his final refuge as before is in the inscrutableness of God. "To be ignorant of things which it is neither possible nor lawful to know is to be learned. An eagerness to know them is a species of madness" (*Inst.* iii, 23. 8). This then is Calvin's terrible dilemma between his ethical sense and his intellectual logic. A synthesis of thought cannot be attained by the mere juxtaposition of contradictory statements however emphatically made. It is simply impossible to follow the logic of Calvin without reaching at last the conclusion that God was the effective cause of Adam's sin and all the fearful consequences that follow from that sin. Is not this the *reductio ad absurdum* of Calvinism? Just because of its own rigorous logic it is condemned by its own inner dialectic before the judgment-seat of ethics.

It must not be forgotten, however, that this system, rigorous as it is, horrible as it seems, was rich in comfort and peace to Calvin and his contemporaries. They had come out from the ancient Church in which they had been born and bred; its traditions and ways were stamped upon their minds and hearts. Although

they had formally renounced it, feelings are more persistent than intellectual convictions. Who could be sure that after all the Church did not hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven? Perhaps salvation did depend upon sacramental grace which the Church alone could mediate. Perhaps the authority of the Church denied, the rites of the Church neglected, would sink them at last in perdition. Fear not, said Calvin's system, salvation is of God's grace alone; the Church has, and can have, nothing to do with it. You are in God's hands and salvation does not depend upon rites performed or good deeds done, upon your worthiness or merit, but upon his sovereign will alone. And, if any troubled soul inquired how he could be sure that he was numbered among the elect, the answer was ready. He had been called out of Romanism by the Spirit of God, and that fact was all-sufficient evidence that he was led by the Spirit and included among the elect whose salvation was sure. Nor need Protestant believers fear persecution, or peril of sword or stake, for God's irresistible grace would prevail to carry them through the fiery trial beyond which was the eternal and glorious bliss of the redeemed. They were in his mighty hand, subject to his will, which controlled for his greater glory and their greater bliss even the malicious fury of their foes. So they were made equal to every event, saying to potentates of church and state, with the serene confidence of their Master,—“You could have no power over me at all except it were given you from above,” and hence well assured that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come could separate them from the love of God, which through all the distresses and persecutions of the present time was leading them to certain triumph and eternal glory, while as for their merciless persecutors—well, they too were in the hands of God, and their fate had been determined before the foundation of the world.